

Discrimination on the grounds of political ideas prevails over other types

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Following the gradual retreat of other stereotypes, political ideas are becoming established as a significant reason for arousing trust or mistrust between people. This is one of the main conclusions in an article published in the *European Journal of Political Research* titled "The tie that divides: Cross-national evidence of the primacy of partyism."

The study was led by Sean Westwood of Dartmouth College with collaborators from the Universities of Stanford and Antwerp, and the Berlin Social Science Center, as well as the UPV/EHU lecturers Rafael Leonisio and Luis Miller.

The article starts with the experimental studies conducted in the United States using the so-called "confidence game," in which two players participate. Player A is assigned \$10 and has to decide how much of this amount he/she will send to player B. The amount B is sent will be multiplied threefold. At the end, player B has to decide how much money to return to A in such a way that the money that A sends would be a measure of the degree of trust he/she would have in B—in other words, the degree to which A trusts B to return part of the money handed over.

In the study, the authors found that the participants had less trust in participants with different political ideologies (Democrat or Republican) than in those with whom they agreed. While the partisan division has a significant effect on trust, interacting in the game with people of a

different racial origin was not found to affect [trust](#) in the same way. This led to the conclusion that antagonism toward ideologically opposed people is greater than that expressed towards people of a different race.

Following this study conducted among U.S. citizens, the research replicated the experiment in three societies with political systems that are different from the U.S.: the United Kingdom, Belgium and the Basque Country. The results obtained according to political ideology were compared with those obtained according to other parameters: religion, in the case of the United Kingdom; region in the case of Belgium; and origin (indigenous ancestry or not) in the Basque Country.

As in all the other countries analysed, [discrimination](#) based on the ethnic criteria was found to be very low in the Basque Country, much lower than that produced by sympathies toward different political parties. In the same way, bearing in mind the double left-right, nationalist-constitutionalist parameter, closeness to one or more of the axes was found to moderate the negative effect of the partisan bias.

What causes partisan discrimination to increase when other forms of discrimination are declining? The researchers say, "There are social norms against any kind of discrimination but not against partisan discrimination. Thus, unlike what happens with racial or [gender discrimination](#), which are severely penalised by [social norms](#), the corresponding pressures in the case of partisan discrimination do not exist. As we can see every day in the political debates and chat shows in Spain, and in other countries in our area, hostility toward and prejudice against those who do not share our political ideas are fully accepted socially and they barely make us blush. And the fact that the rhetoric of most of the leaders of the parties makes it seem perfectly acceptable to despise political opponents."

More information: SEAN J. WESTWOOD et al, The tie that divides:

Cross-national evidence of the primacy of partyism, *European Journal of Political Research* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.12228](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12228)

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